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ABSTRACT

In response to demographic changes among entering college students, more and more colleges are offering freshman orientation courses that have come to be known as "College 101." At Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, a course called COL 101 was begun in 1985. A survey of teachers of the course investigated speech or oral communication exercises included in the COL 101 classes. The exercises fit into three categories: individual speaking (which included group presentations); "interpersonal" types of exercises (such as ice breakers, confidence builders, and free discussion); and "speeches" (often more reports than speeches). All of these exercises rely on creative methods to involve the new student with subject matter and the skills to present it. Speech communication instructors can make unique contributions to the freshman orientation course and could offer their services to campus orientation organizers. A "swap shop" discussion of effective suggestions, helpful critique sheets, or discussion leadership could assist freshman orientation courses at every level. (SR)

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Communication Exercises as Instructional Tools

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"The right word in the right place," was the definition of rhetoric given by Ben Johnson so many years ago. The curricular trend for first year students has increasingly become the right course given at the right time. That course on more and more campuses is the freshman orientation course often called College 101. As the demographic changes among the students have underscored the differences in preparation among new students, colleges have responded by offering several versions of these extended orientation sessions.

The purpose of this paper is to present suggestions to two types of college instructors -- those who have never led such a class; and, those who might like to have some new suggestions. Another use for this paper, as well as the other papers from this panel, is to argue for speech communication teachers to take a more active role in making suggestions for colleagues who teach COL 101. In group meetings of instructors and their course assistants the"swap shop" approach often is utilized. Such a time to share techniques is yet another method for spreading the word that the effective teaching of oral communication skills is what effective teaching and learning is all about.

For those who have not instituted this programatic concept on your campus, some background information about the freshman orientation movement is in order. The motivation for assisting new students is not as new as some might think. Gordon & Grites (1984) remind us that the first recorded seminar for credit was developed at Reed College in 1911. The University of South Carolina is cited as the birth place of the most recent emphasis on assisting freshman with an orientation program given for credit. The U of SC was responding in 1972 to the campus disruptions; however, now the current "model of freshman year seminar is a deliberate positive interventional effort designed to improve the student's first college experience. Increased retention of students is its most practical outcome" (Murphy, 1989).

The changing demographics of the freshman class nation-wide is a phenomenon never anticipated by the founders of many institutions of higher education. At the Freshman Experience Conference held in Irvine, CA, 1989, Upcraft gave great detail about the changing face of the college freshman. She quoted Harold Hodgkinson's predictions that by the year 2000 nearly one out of

five freshmen will have been born out wedlock; nearly one half will have been raised by a single parent sometime during their childhood; and, more children will come from blended families. Two out of three freshman will have mothers who work outside of the home before they were of school age while one out of five college women will have had a child before coming to college.

Upcraft cited the family factors above and added them to the changes in perspective about human development. Her focus concerned the new insights about student development theory that have influenced not only what colleges teach, but how the subject matter is taught. Upcraft's reviewed some motivators for concern noting the following: the rising diversity of students; women's issues which range from eating disorders to date rape; students beginning college at older ages; differences in sexual orientation; and, the need for crisis intervention for those suffering with various problems from drug abuse to mental health problems. These unsettling factors play an ever increasing role in the stressors which effect college freshmen. Taken together the factors give impetus for the need to pay attention to the beginning students. Upcraft continued to trace the change in student development theory referring to Nevitt Sanford's support and challenge theory.

> Students are more likely to succeed in college when there is a balance between the support they receive in the collegiate environment and the challenge of that environment. Too much support leads to dependence and apathy, and too much challenge is overwhelming. Particularly in dealing with freshmen students, we have to balance support and challenge constantly.
>
> When caring is communicated to students with compassion and love and concern, we have done what we need to do for the freshman students. (Upcraft, 1989)

Murphy (1989) reminds us of yet another motivation for instituting the College 101 seminars and that deals with the need for a response to the criticisms leveled at higher education in such books as A Nation at Risk, Involvement in Learning, One-Third of a Nation, and College : The Undergraduate Experience. He notes that these reports have a common

theme-- that the conditions of learning have a direct connection with the outcomes of learning. The challenge is that we in higher education need to structure a climate that provides for the new student the best opportunity to maximize his/her learning experience. The improved climate will also lead to the student's retention mentioned before.

Banta(1990) picked up the theme of evaluation and expanded on it by noting that assessment of outcomes or program evaluation has increased from coast to coast with particular emphasis in state funded institutions because of the cry for responsibility from external agencies; but also prviate institutions have responded by instituting methods of evaluation. Speaking to the private schools which many of you in this audience represent, the retention prospects are a solid motivation, but Banta adds that programmatic responses to assessment findings are acknowledged as good practice in higher education.

Murphy (1989) noted that the freshman orientation seminars may follow one of five models: Success/Survival which is best typified by the University of South Carolina which emphasizes the skills necessary to survive college; the Academic model which uses the great books or social problems approach for the freshmen course; the Professional model focuses on a career-oriented seminar; the Curricualr Model requires an emphasis on the entire first year of academic work; and finally the Eclectic Model which uses parts of the aforementioned four models with the instructor emphasizing what his/her group of students should know about their institution, library research, career planning, and including academic readings and student writing practice. It is this last model with which I am most familiar; nevertheless, communication exercises could be used in any of the four other models because of the inherent use of and need for the practice oral skills.

Returning to reasons in favor of the COL 101 concept, Murphy (1989) wrote that the "sense of identification which leads to commitment can be expedited and intensified by the freshman seminar. The seminar creates 'bonding'." However those of us who have noted the effectiveness of Murphy's assertion would not want to omit other considerations which he claims come from the experience such as certain skills and knowledge that can be taught

within the orientation format. Lastly Murphy recommended that faculty who teach such seminars be trained. It is on this last issue that teachers of speech communication can exert some influence. After describing some communication exercises that can be included, this paper wiil give some suggestions about the leadership speech communication instructors can give.

Banta (1990) also gave this warning, "For many faculty, however, these suggestions for good practice will remain unread words on a page in the absence of some impetus to pay attention to them." With that in mind let me share some suggestions for using speech communication exercises in the COL 101 course.

The " COL 101 class was begun in 1985 at this writer's institution, Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio. Our campus services approximately 2500 full-time day students over 1700 of whom live on campus and are of traditional age, 17 to 22. Another 2500 students are non-traditional, that is over the age of 25, who come to classes evenings and week ends. (We do have a growing number of non-traditional day-time students who do not elect to enroll in the orientation program.) Our program has steadily grown in numbers of students and in the number of faculty and staff who have been trained and then offered to teach. The class is given for three quarter hours of graded credit only during the first quarter, that is each fall term; and, is not required of all freshmen.

Because our school allows freedom to adapt to the between 15 and 18 students in each section, the previously trained faculty along with his/her trained course assistant are encouraged to organize a class strategy that will "work" for both people. We encourage what Murphy described as the "eclectic model". That is, each course is expected to include some exercises to acquaint the student with higher education in general, and Baldwin-Wallace College in particular. The content also includes an emphasis on library research, studying selected readings or perhaps a book, various writing exercises, as well as attending college events and other "social" mixers such as ball games and pizza parties.

In an attempt to gather some descriptive material, this writer surveyed the existing instructors as well as some who have taught before the fall of 1992. (This writer has taught the COL 101 twice, but is presently not teaching a section.) The exercises regardless of the topic fit into three categories that could be easily identified as "speech" or oral communication exercises: interpersonal, small group, and one-to-many presentations recognized as "speeches".

There were no sections of COL 101 that I surveyed that did not include some individual speaking. One of the most popular formats was the "group presentation" in which the students prepare some material and present the content as a panel or at least in the company of their group members. Topics varied from those selected by the professor to topics suggested by the students; from current event issues to reactions to case studies; and, from selected readings to reports on campus activities. The obvious attempt to cushion the shock of speaking by including several students perhaps increases cooperation while it decreases the threat factor. One would need to survey the students to discover if those types of group projects are preferred over the single presentation requirements.

"Interpersonal" types of exercises are used by all sections, yet the instructors did not usually recognize this type as a"communication" exercise. Getting-to-know-you and other ice breaker exercises are regularly used. One instructor developed quite an extensive "confidence building" set of exercises giving this as his rationale: "One common element in efforts to increase self-confidence is emotional risk. One must face risk and overcome the fear of failure through achievement in order to gain self-confidence." The instructor gave a list of possible exercises which included disagreeing with an articulate classmate, raising money for a charity by soliciting friends and neighbors, or trying out for a part in a college theatre production. The list was much more extensive, but the assignment went further. After having completed the exercise, each student must share with the class the results of his/her confidence building experiment in a fifteen minute presentation.

Some sections encourage an informal "what's on your mind" type of free discussion period sometimes at pre-arranged times, or whenever there is time. All sections include "discussion" as a prime method of class participation. One wonders how effectively the more quiet members of the class are encouraged to become involved. I did not note any role-playing listed as a technique, yet I know that occasionally instructors do use role-playing. Interpersonal exercises are not always identified as a particular type of communication exercise by those outside of the speech communication field of study .

The presentations labeled a "speech" appeared to be more "reports" than speeches. That is, presenting a chapter from a book to the class or reporting on a campus activity or organization does not meet the usual criterion for a speech. Interviewing a professor or the unique assignment of interviewing a member of the custodial crew, buildings and grounds crew, or food service worker still tend to fit the prototype of "report". Answering questions with a speech somewhat fits the category of speech, as does the situation in which the students suggest topics and the speaker may choose one of the suggestions. Nevertheless, such an oral communication exercise will give the student the opportunity to organize, practice, and present in front of an audience.

Speeches that fit the category of "public speaking" in which the speaker chooses a topic and adapts to his/her audience fit the following sorts of assignments: pick some background information about your self that you want to share; or, choose any topic that you deem appropriate. The length of any of these orally presented assignments can vary from 2 minutes to 15 minutes with some group presentations lasting an entire class session.

As all of these exercises suggest, the COL 101 classes rely on creative methods to involve the new student with subject matter and the skills to present that material. The Freshman Year Experience is an organization located at the University of South Carolina which will send materials, trainers, and which organizes conferences (over 40 in twelve years) attended by those campus delegates who have existing programs; those who are considering establishing such a program; or, those who have special concerns such as the "Undecided Student" or "Focus on Diversity". The workshops that train faculty and staff

members who express an interest in COL 101 emphasize the active involvement of students with one another and with the faculty and course assistant. The exercises used for this training are very "interpersonal" that is experiential in nature. However, there are some unique contributions that a speech communication instructor can offer which might help the freshmen orientation course.

Because speech instructors are trained to teach the organization and delivery that will produce effective speeches, group discussions, and interpersonal exercises, the speech communication professional could offer his/her services to the campus orientation organizers. A "swap shop" discussion of effective suggestions, helpful critique sheets, or discussion leadership could assist the COL 101 classes at every level. This writer is often called upon to come to a class to "explain" nonverbal communication, gender issues, visual aids,or just "how to organize and deliver" a speech. If the organizers on your campus could use your assistance, or you simply wish to offer your help, why not take the initiative? On this writer's campus, the central orientation organizers publish a list of people available and willing to help along with the specific topics that each persons is willing to share. This is a valuable resource for the COL 101 instructors.

Consider yourself a resource, and then become resourceful.

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